

Kelsey Jolley, Spirit Lake NEPA Coordinator
U.S. Forest Service - 987 McClellan Road Vancouver, WA 98661
Spirit Lake Outflow Safety Improvement Project Team

Subject: Public Comment on Notice of Intent for Spirit Lake Outflow Safety Improvement Project
#66482 Environment Impact Statement

To Kelsey Jolly,

On behalf of the Lower Columbia Fish Enhancement Group (LCFEG), we are one of 14 regional fish enhancement groups in Washington state making up the Regional Fisheries Coalition (RFC). LCFEG's mission is to promote recovery of self-sustaining, naturally spawning salmonid populations and healthy aquatic ecosystems. I am writing to express our support for proposed alternatives that provide a natural, open-channel connection of Spirit Lake to the North Fork of the Toutle River as part of the Spirit Lake Outflow Safety Improvement Project #66482.

Before the eruption of Mount St. Helens, there was volitional passage to Spirit Lake for anadromous fish species. It is widely acknowledged that if the outflow tunnel had not been constructed as a necessary and needed short-term solution, the lake would have naturally reconnected to the North Fork of the Toutle River, restoring critical fish passage. The proposed alternatives offering open channel reconnection provide a unique opportunity to safely and controllably re-establish this historic ecological connection.

This restoration would not only provide vital habitat for endangered salmonid species but would do so in a manner that poses no increased risk to downstream communities. By taking a nature-based approach, we can enhance ecological resilience while addressing public safety concerns through effective management of the outflow system. LCFEG strongly supports the natural open channel alternatives and encourages the U.S. Forest Service to pursue solutions that prioritize ecosystem recovery and the long-term health of the Spirit Lake and Toutle watershed.

Thank you for considering our input on this important project. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with all stakeholders to ensure both the safety and environmental sustainability of this region.

Sincerely,
Morgan Morris

Morgan Morris

Executive Director
Lower Columbia Fish Enhancement Group (LCFEG)
11018 NE 51st Circle
Vancouver, WA 98682
360-335-5271
www.lcfeg.org